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ABSTRACT

Many people do not recognize reading development as a continuum, but the literacy needs of the adolescent reader are far different from those of primary-grade children. This position paper discusses some of those literacy needs and outlines seven principles supporting adolescents' literacy growth. Adolescents deserve: (1) access to a wide variety of reading material; (2) instruction that builds both the skill and desire to read increasingly complex materials; (3) assessment that shows them their strengths as well as their needs and that guides their teachers to design instruction that will best help them grow as readers; (4) expert teachers who model and provide explicit instruction in reading comprehension and study strategies across the curriculum; (5) reading specialists who assist students having difficulty learning to read; (6) teachers who understand the complexities of individual adolescent readers, respect their differences, and respond to their characteristics; and (7) homes, communities, and a nation that will support their efforts to achieve advanced levels of literacy and provide support for them to succeed. (Contains 92 suggested readings.) (NKA)

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Adolescent literacy

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Adolescent literacy

A position statement

for the Commission on Adolescent Literacy of the International Reading Association

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Purpose and charges of the Commission on Adolescent Literacy

The International Reading Association's Board of Directors approved the formation of the Commission on Adolescent Literacy at its January 1997 meeting. The Commission was given a 3-year opportunity to advise the Board on policies and priorities related to the literacies of adolescents in and out of schools, as well as literacy teaching and learning in middle and high schools. The Board asked the Commission to reflect on the current state of affairs of adolescent literacy, revitalize professional interest in and commitment to the literacy needs of adolescents, and advise and make recommendations to the Board concerning future directions for the field of adolescent literacy. More specifically, the charges included the following:

- Conduct an assessment of the Association's current activities in the area of adolescent literacy.
- Advise the Board and make recommendations regarding the Association's continuing role in adolescent literacy.
- Develop a proposal for actions the Association should take to enhance its role in the area of adolescent literacy. Proposed actions should address professional development, publications, membership growth, research and policy, and advocacy.
- Serve an advisory and coordinating function to include but not be restricted to proposing and initiating professional development and publications projects, subject to Board approval and established Association review processes.
- Recommend partnerships and coalitions with other professional education groups concerned with adolescent literacy.

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Adolescent literacy: A position statement

for the Commission on Adolescent Literacy of the International Reading Association

Adolescents deserve more

Carol Minnick Santa, President
International Reading Association

I want to thank members of the International Reading Association's Commission on Adolescent Literacy for the development of this position paper, which was approved by the Association's Board of Directors in May 1999. Ironically, the Board approved this statement in the aftermath of the shattering violence at Columbine High School in Colorado—a vivid and horrible testimony to the ever-deepening crises in adolescent literacy. If only these young men had been touched by a book or a teacher, or had felt more connected with their school, perhaps none of this would have happened. As teachers and parents, we have to do things differently.

This position statement is a start. We must begin with a clear message about what adolescents deserve. Adolescents are being short-changed. No one is giving adolescent literacy much press. It is certainly not a hot topic in educational policy or a priority in schools. In the United States, most Title I budgets are allocated for early intervention—little is left over for the struggling adolescent reader. Even if all children do learn to read by Grade 3, the literacy needs of the adolescent reader are far different from those of primary-grade children. Many people don't recognize reading development as a continuum. Moreover, schools have worked hard to re-

duce class size for children in grades K–3, while at the same time we have watched a steady increase in class size as children progress through school. Reading specialists have become history in too many middle and high schools.

I speak for the Association's Board of Directors as we unanimously endorse the powerful messages in this document. We hope it will provide you with a tool for becoming a stronger advocate for the adolescents in your neighborhood school, your community, your state or province, and your country.

A day in the literacy lives of Nick and Kristy Araujo

"Hey, Nick, wake up!" Nick Araujo felt his friend Adam's punch in the arm, jolting him out of his daydream in fourth-period English at Polytechnic High. Mr. Potter, his teacher, had assigned Charles Dickens's *A Tale of Two Cities*, a really ancient book that Nick's dad said he had to read years ago. Today they were supposed to take an essay test on the book. They never talked about what they read, and, anyway, Nick was preoccupied with thoughts about the new virtual bass fishing game he'd read about in his *North American Fisherman* magazine.

Fortunately, the video he'd watched of *A Tale of Two Cities* got him through the essay test ordeal, then it was on to psychology class. Mr. Jackson was great. He knew how to make any topic interesting, and his class seemed more like a television talk show than school. Nick struggled with reading, but he loved watching movies, and he was able to use his vast knowledge of cinema in this class. Yesterday they had talked about a film of people meeting on the Internet, and today's discussion was about why some people create false identities in Internet chat rooms.

As the final bell rang, Nick headed out to his small truck in the parking lot. He was off to the gym to lift some weights. At least he didn't have to work today; there was lots of time for the assignment from his history class. That teacher just dumped work on them without any idea of what she wanted. Nick was supposed to write a five-paragraph essay about a famous person. That was all the instruction Mrs. Nathan provided. Maybe his hotshot sister, Kristy, could help.

"No, Nick," Kristy said, when he got home. "I have to practice my serves for volleyball, and I have to study for a science test. I hate science. All we do is read the book, and then he gives us a test. I don't have time to do your homework, too."

"There goes Kristy again," Nick thought. It was hard to be the brother of a straight-A seventh grader who was a star athlete too. Nick plunked down on the couch and turned on the *Legend of Zelda* video game. Off into the world of Hyrule. "Hey, Kristy, I need to know what *dispel* means for this game."

"I don't know. Figure it out or go look it up in the dictionary yourself!"

Nick looked it up, then passed into the Zora domain.

"Mom, what famous person should I do my essay on?"

"You like hunting, Nick. How about Daniel Boone or Davy Crockett? They're famous people who hunted."

Nick headed into the family room, where the computer was, to search the Internet for some information on famous hunters. Of course Kristy was hogging the computer again. She was probably in a chat room with her friends or writing her secret diary. Or she was playing that geography game again. "Kristy's idea of fun looks like work to me," Nick thought.

"Hey, Kristy, I thought you had to study. It's my turn."

Kristy bounced out of the room, grabbing a copy of *Chicken Soup for the Teenage Soul*. Time for a quick story before tackling her boring science assignment.

She read the section of her textbook on mitosis and meiosis and dutifully outlined it. Mr. Taylor didn't care if they understood it; they only needed to memorize key parts for the test. She finished quickly, then went outside and hit volleyballs against a wall.

Meanwhile, Nick printed out a biography on Davy Crockett and headed into the kitchen to help his mom with a quick microwave dinner.

After dinner, Kristy went back on the computer to begin her assignment for language arts class.

She loved to search the Internet. They had read Mildred D. Taylor's *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*, and her assignment was to research events during the Great Depression that might have affected Cassie's life. There was sure to be a lively discussion tomorrow in class, and Kristy wanted to be prepared. She enjoyed Mrs. Mangrum's class.

Nick disappeared upstairs to compose his essay while talking to his girlfriend, Jennifer, on the phone. Kristy finished her work for language arts class and settled down to watch her favorite series on television. Then it was time for bed and a few minutes of reading *Teen People* magazine.

Nick fell asleep, sprawled on his bed with his nearly completed essay scattered on his bedroom floor.

This fictional account of Nick and Kristy's day illustrates how adolescents read and write amid conditions they and their families, friends, schools, and society establish. To be sure, Kristy and Nick's day only hints at the actual literacy practices of the more than 20,000,000 students currently enrolled in U.S. middle and high schools. Adolescents use print—and learn how to use print—in countless ways.

Despite the prevalence of literacy in adolescents' lives, educational policies, school curricula, and the public currently are neglecting it. For instance, state and federal funding for middle and high school reading programs in the United States has decreased. Fewer and fewer schools are able to hire reading specialists who work with individual students and help teachers of all subjects be more effective teachers of reading. The limited number of reading education courses required for preservice middle and high school teachers often does not sufficiently prepare them to respond to the escalating needs of adolescent learners.

This position statement developed by the International Reading Association Commission on Adolescent Literacy (CAL) calls for the literacy of adolescents to be addressed directly and effectively. We begin by responding to questions that bring into the open some common misconceptions.

Questions and answers about adolescent literacy

Shouldn't adolescents already be literate?

As the story of Nick and Kristy's day indicates, adolescents generally have learned a great deal about reading and writing, but they have not learned all they need. For instance, the 1998 Reading Report Card produced by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) showed that a majority of U.S. adolescents (approximately 60%) can comprehend specific factual information. Yet few have gone beyond the basics to advanced reading and writing. Fewer than 5% of the adolescents NAEP assessed could extend or elaborate the meanings of the materials they read. The NAEP writing assessments have indicated that few adolescents could write effective pieces with sufficient details to support main points.

Adolescents entering the adult world in the 21st century will read and write more than at any other time in human history. They will need advanced levels of literacy to perform their jobs, run their households, act as citizens, and conduct their personal lives. They will need literacy to cope with the flood of information they will find everywhere they turn. They will need literacy to feed their imaginations so they can create the world of the future. In a complex and sometimes even dangerous world, their ability to read will be crucial. Continual instruction beyond the early grades is needed.

Couldn't the problem be solved by preventing reading difficulties early on?

Reading success in the early grades certainly pays off later, but early achievement is not the end of the story. Just as children pass through stages of turning over, sitting up, crawling, walking, and running as they develop control of their bodies, there are developmental stages of reading and writing. During the preschool and primary school years, children learn how written language can be used for purposes such as telling stories and recording facts, how print is arranged on a page, and how letters and sounds combine to form words. These are major accomplishments, but they are only the first steps of growth into full literacy.

When all goes well, upper grade youth increase their reading fluency and adjust their reading speed according to their reasons for reading. They

discern the characteristics of different types of fiction and nonfiction materials. They refine their tastes in reading and their responses to literature. Middle and high school students build on the literacy strategies they learned in the early grades to make sense of abstract, complex subjects far removed from their personal experiences. For Nick, Kristy, and other adolescents, the microscopic realm explained in a science book and the French Revolution depicted in *A Tale of Two Cities* can be strange worlds described in alien words.

The need to guide adolescents to advanced stages of literacy is not the result of any teaching or learning failure in the preschool or primary years; it is a necessary part of normal reading development. Guidance is needed so that reading and writing develop along with adolescents' ever increasing oral language, thinking ability, and knowledge of the world.

Even with the best instruction early on, differences magnify as students develop from year to year. Today's adolescents enter school speaking many different languages and coming from many different backgrounds and experiences, so their academic progress differs substantially. Some teens need special instruction to comprehend basic ideas in print. Others need extensive opportunities with comfortable materials so they learn to read smoothly and easily. And almost all students need to be supported as they learn unfamiliar vocabulary, manage new reading and writing styles, extend positive attitudes toward literacy, and independently apply complex learning strategies to print.

Why isn't appropriate literacy instruction already being provided to adolescents?

Exemplary programs of adolescent literacy instruction certainly exist, but they are the exception because upper grade goals often compete with reading development. Elementary schools traditionally emphasize mathematics and literacy instruction, but middle and secondary schools generally shift attention to other matters.

Middle school programs often emphasize an expanded range of student needs: physical, emotional, and social, as well as academic. Although literacy growth might be recognized as important, many schools do not include reading instruction in the curriculum for all students. Language arts teachers often have sole responsibility for guiding students' reading growth while still being held accountable for covering a literature program, teaching grammar, offering personal advisory programs, and so on.

High school teachers often feel a great responsibility to impart knowledge about subjects such as science or history in which they are expert. This focus on subject matter is supported by the typical organization of high schools with the faculty assigned to separate departments and the day divided among separate subjects. Many teachers come to believe that teaching students how to effectively read and write is not their responsibility. Without intending to do so, they might send subtle messages that adolescents' continued growth in reading and writing is incidental.

So is there a solution?

There are no easy answers or quick fixes. Adolescents deserve nothing less than a comprehensive effort to support their continued development as readers and writers. A productive first step is for all involved in the lives of adolescents to commit themselves to definite programs of literacy growth. The CAL recommends the following principles as touchstones for such programs.

What adolescents deserve: Principles for supporting adolescents' literacy growth

1. Adolescents deserve access to a wide variety of reading material that they can and want to read.

The account of Kristy and Nick's day shows adolescents reading inside- and outside-of-school print such as textbooks, paperbacks, magazines, and Web sites. Yet national assessments provoke concern about the amount of such reading among adolescents. For instance, the 1996 NAEP findings indicate that about one quarter of the tested adolescents reported daily reading of five or fewer pages in school and for homework. As students grow older, the amount of time they read for fun declines. About one half of the tested 9-year-old students reported reading for fun on a daily basis, whereas only about one quarter of the 17-year-old students reported doing so. Literacy research and professional judgment support at least four reasons for providing adolescents access to inside- and outside-of-school reading materials they can and want to read.

• *Time spent reading is related to reading success.* If students devote some time every day reading connected text, their word knowledge, fluency, and comprehension tend to increase. Reading continuously for a brief part of each day is a small investment for a large return.

• *Time spent reading is associated with attitudes toward additional reading.* Students who habitually read in the present tend to seek out new materials in the future. These students are on the way to lifelong reading.

• *Time spent reading is tied to knowledge of the world.* Combining materials such as textbooks, library books, paperbacks, magazines, and Web sites provides full accounts of phenomena, new vocabulary, and up-to-date information. These materials permit readers to expand and strengthen their grasp of the world.

• *Reading is a worthwhile life experience.* Readers can find comfort and delight in print. Vicariously stepping into text worlds can nourish teens' emotions and psyches as well as their intellects.

Providing opportunities to achieve the outcomes just listed is accomplished through a network of educators, librarians, parents, community members, peers, policy makers, technology providers, and publishers. These groups affect middle and high school students' access to wide reading by shaping the following elements:

• *Time.* An often overlooked—yet essential—component of access to reading is the time available for it. Adolescents deserve specific opportunities to schedule reading into their days.

• *Choice.* Choosing their own reading materials is important to adolescents who are seeking independence. All adolescents, and especially those who struggle with reading, deserve opportunities to select age-appropriate materials they can manage and topics and genres they prefer. Adolescents deserve classroom, school, and public libraries that offer reading materials tied to popular television and movie productions; magazines about specific interests such as sports, music, or cultural backgrounds; and books by favorite authors. They deserve book clubs, class sets of paperbacks, and personal subscriptions to magazines.

• *Support.* Time and choice mean little if there is no support. Support includes actions such as bringing books to the classroom, arousing interest in them, orally reading selections, and fostering student-to-student and student-to-adult conversations about what is read. Adolescents deserve these supports so they will identify themselves as readers and take advantage of the times and choices that are offered.

2. Adolescents deserve instruction that builds both the skill and desire to read increasingly complex materials.

Kristy and Nick Araujo tackled their assignments with a few basic reading and writing strategies. Outlining text passages and looking up an unfamiliar word like *dispel* in the dictionary are some of strategies Nick and Kristy used in their studies. However, these teens will need to expand their strategies to handle increasingly complex material now and in the future. In addition, Nick's history as a struggling reader indicates he will need extra help if he is to grasp future concepts successfully. Adolescents need well-developed repertoires of reading comprehension and study strategies such as the following:

• questioning themselves about what they read;

• synthesizing information from various sources;

• identifying, understanding, and remembering key vocabulary;

• recognizing how a text is organized and using that organization as a tool for learning;

• organizing information in notes;

• interpreting diverse symbol systems in subjects such as biology and algebra;

• searching the Internet for information;

• judging their own understanding; and

• evaluating authors' ideas and perspectives.

Many teaching practices are available for supporting adolescent learners as they apply strategies to complex texts. For example, teachers who introduce some of the technical vocabulary students will encounter in a chapter help reduce comprehension problems, and students help themselves by independently previewing passages and discerning the meanings of unfamiliar words. Study-guide questions and statements that prompt students from literal understandings to higher order ones also foster comprehension. When teachers inform students while the guides are being phased out, adolescents can appropriate for themselves the thinking strategies the guides stimulated.

Middle and secondary schools where reading specialists work with content area teachers in the core areas of science, mathematics, English, and social studies show great promise. For example, a reading specialist's work with a social studies teacher to map ideas during a unit on the Aztec, Inca, and Mayan cultures can become the basis for teaching students to map ideas as an independent study strategy. The CAL recommends that content area teachers and reading specialists work together to effectively support adolescents' development of advanced reading strategies.

Developing students' advanced reading skills is insufficient if adolescents choose not to read. Unfortunately, students' attitudes toward reading tend to decline as they advance into the middle grades, with a particularly disturbing impact on struggling readers like Nick. Attitudes toward reading contribute to reading achievement.

Caring teachers who act on adolescents' interests and who design meaningful inquiry projects address motivational needs. For example, Kristy was excited about independently researching events of the Great Depression that affected Cassie's life in *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*. Based on her experiences in this class, Kristy knew she would have an attentive audience for discussing her research and a considerate teacher supporting and evaluating her demonstration of knowledge. Mrs. Mangrum regularly fostered discussions of multicultural literature, and she expressed sincere interest in her students' wide ranging cultural and ethnic differences, learning styles, and needs for respect and security. In addition to having the whole class read and talk about one particular novel, Mrs. Mangrum provided students access to various books for self-selected reading on their own. She gleaned books from her own classroom collection, students' recommendations, and a close working relationship with her school librarian. Adolescents deserve classrooms like Mrs. Mangrum's that knowingly promote the desire to read.

3. Adolescents deserve assessment that shows them their strengths as well as their needs and that guides their teachers to design instruction that will best help them grow as readers.

National-level mandates on education such as Goals 2000 and the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act in the United States require that states develop standards for instruction and assess student achievement of the standards. In some states these measures are being used to determine the type of diploma students receive and whether or not students will even graduate. Although state assessments are useful in monitoring the achievement of standards, they rarely indicate specific teaching-learning experiences that foster literacy development.

Adolescents deserve classroom assessments that bridge the gap between what they know and are able to do and relevant curriculum standards; they deserve assessments that map a path toward continued literacy growth. For instance, when Nick began writing his essay about a famous person, he did not seem clear about the expected standards. He probably would have benefited from understanding how writing this particular essay connected with the world beyond the classroom. He could have used lessons on how to accomplish expectations. He might have benefited from examining papers that reflected the expected standards. And he could have profited from a rubric or scoring guide that clearly articulated the standards for evaluation.

Conferring with his teacher and classmates about how his efforts fit curriculum standards also might have promoted Nick's writing. During such conferences he would have opportunities to assess his own writing, set specific goals, and decide on strategies for achieving his goals. Further, Nick would benefit from maintaining a record of his efforts in something like a portfolio to help gauge his reading and writing growth and plan appropriate actions. Emphasizing relevance and self-improvement in classroom assessment encourages adolescents to invest themselves in learning. It helps them understand how to control the rate and quality of their own literacy growth.

Effective assessments are crucial for students who come from environments that differ from Kristy and Nick's. Using tests simply to determine which students will graduate or which type of diploma students will receive especially disadvantages adolescents from homes where English is not the first language or where poverty endures. It wrongs those most in need of enriched educational opportunities.

In sum, the CAL believes that adolescents deserve classroom assessments that

- are regular extensions of instruction;
- provide usable feedback based on clear, attainable, and worthwhile standards;
- exemplify quality performances illustrating the standards; and
- position students as partners with teachers evaluating progress and setting goals.

4. Adolescents deserve expert teachers who model and provide explicit instruction in reading comprehension and study strategies across the curriculum.

Like masters with apprentices, expert teachers immerse students in a discipline and teach them how to control it. Expert teachers engage students with a novel such as *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* in Kristy's language arts class or a topic such as the presentation of self in Nick's psychology class. Then they teach reading, writing, and thinking strategies that enable students to explore and learn about subject matter. Reading and subject matter teachers often collaborate to provide such instruction.

If Kristy's teacher, Mrs. Mangrum, were teaching self-questioning as a strategy, she might first take a chapter of *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* and model queries such as "What became clear to me?" and "I wonder why Cassie didn't complain to her teacher about the school bus driver running them off the road." Mrs. Mangrum would explain how she arrived at answers to her questions, thinking through the process aloud. She would explicitly demonstrate how to ask and answer productive questions during this stage of instruction.

Next Mrs. Mangrum and Kristy's class might produce questions and answers collectively, again thinking aloud. At first they might stay with the chapter Mrs. Mangrum began with, or they might move to another. Together the students and teacher would explain and comment on what they were doing. Additionally, Mrs. Mangrum might provide written guides for students to question themselves, exploring and experimenting with the strategy on their own. She also might design small-group assignments that encourage students to reflect on self-questioning, sharing how they used it and difficulties they overcame.

Eventually Mrs. Mangrum would expect Kristy and her classmates to apply self-questioning on their own. She would remind students to question themselves while reading other novels and passages later in the year. Throughout this cycle of instruction, she would have students assess how well they were accomplishing the strategy.

Research on expert teachers has produced an image of decision makers effectively orchestrating classroom life. Expert teachers help students get to the next level of strategy development by addressing meaningful topics, making visible certain strategies, then gradually releasing responsibility for the strategies to the learners. Adolescents deserve such instruction in all their classes.

5. Adolescents deserve reading specialists who assist individual students having difficulty learning how to read.

In the early 1900s standardized tests in the United States revealed large numbers of adolescents reading well below expectations. This finding sparked many educators and members of the public to develop programs for adolescents that included remedial instruction in reading classes and modified instruction in regular subject-matter classes. Federally funded programs to compensate for the effects of poverty on achievement later were instituted for reading, writing, and mathematics instruction.

National-level data continue highlighting the presence of adolescents like Nick with reading needs. For instance, 13% of fall 1989 first-year higher education students in the United States were enrolled in courses devoted specifically to remedial reading. The high school dropout rate, which is related to literacy difficulties, was 11% in 1993. Race, ethnicity, and economic status continue to be strongly associated with reading achievement. Although the number of secondary schools that assist adolescents who struggle with reading is declining, most schools still provide programs. These include widely varying provisions such as special education classes, after-school tutoring, and content reading integration.

Reading difficulties do not occur in a vacuum. Adolescents' personal identities, academic achievement, and future aspirations mix with ongoing difficulties with reading. Because literacy promises to enhance individuals as well as society,

adolescents struggling with reading deserve assistance by professionals specially prepared in reading. The CAL recommends services that include the following:

- providing tutorial reading instruction that is part of a comprehensive program connected with subject matter teachers, parents, and the community;
- structuring challenging, relevant situations in special reading classes and in subject matter classrooms where students succeed and become self-sufficient learners;
- assessing students' reading and writing—and enabling students to assess their own reading and writing—to plan instruction, foster individuals' control of their literacy, and immediately support learners when progress diminishes;
- teaching vocabulary, fluency, comprehension, and study strategies tailored to individuals' competencies;
- relating literacy practices to life management issues such as exploring careers, examining individuals' roles in society, setting goals, managing time and stress, and resolving conflicts; and
- offering reading programs that recognize potentially limiting forces such as work schedules, family responsibilities, and peer pressures.

6. Adolescents deserve teachers who understand the complexities of individual adolescent readers, respect their differences, and respond to their characteristics.

Adolescents demonstrate substantial differences. In the Araujo family, Nick's interests in film and the outdoors differed from Kristy's preferences for athletics and teen culture. Nick tended to struggle with and avoid school-based reading and writing tasks; Kristy generally excelled with and enthusiastically approached them.

Viewing members of one family in relation to another calls attention to additional differences. Factors such as family heritage, language, and social and economic position contribute to the variation that students regularly display during reading and writing activities.

Differences also are apparent when individuals are considered one at a time. Nick often was preoccupied in one class, English, but highly engaged in another, psychology. Kristy hated how her science teacher conducted class but enjoyed language arts. Nick and Kristy probably acted slightly differently from day to day in all their classes depending on what was happening in their personal worlds.

Adolescents deserve classrooms that respect individuals' differences. To promote respect, teachers encourage the exchange of ideas among individuals. They regularly set up paired, small-group, and whole-class arrangements so that everyone can have his or her voice heard. Believing that everyone has something to offer, they organize instruction so students of diverse backgrounds share their insights into course topics. One of the reasons Kristy eagerly researched the Great Depression was that she anticipated a productive discussion the next day.

Respectful classrooms are safe enough for students to take risks when expressing themselves publicly. No rudeness, put-downs, or ugly remarks are allowed. Learners address others courteously and expect courteous treatment in turn. They disagree without being disagreeable, contesting others' ideas without personal insults.

Respectful classrooms also display positive expectations. Teachers believe that students who are taught appropriately can meet rigorous standards. They acknowledge conditions outside of class that might interfere with learning, but they inspire teens to be resilient and take charge of their lives. Learning failures are unacceptable.

Along with respect, individual adolescents deserve teachers who respond to their characteristics. Responsive teachers address the mandated curriculum while engaging students in self-expression. To illustrate, Nick's five-paragraph report on a famous person could be extended several ways. Nick could inquire into Davy Crockett through interviews, library materials, and textbooks as well as through the Internet. He could enrich his investigation by examining legendary aspects of Crockett or he could look at Crockett's role as an icon of individualism. Nick could supplement his essay by representing Crockett through a poem, poster, Readers Theatre, or skit. Teachers often limit such choices to manageable options, but they offer choices and supports for accomplishing them.

In sum, adolescents deserve more than a centralized, one-size-fits-all approach to literacy. They deserve teachers who establish productive conditions for learning; move into individuals' worlds

with respect, choice, and support; and move out to allow growth.

7. Adolescents deserve homes, communities, and a nation that will support their efforts to achieve advanced levels of literacy and provide the support necessary for them to succeed.

For adolescents, growing in literacy means being continually stretched. Because of this, adolescents deserve all the support they can get, not only from school but from their families, communities, and the nation.

Parents play an important role. They help adolescents extend and consolidate their literacy by engaging them in discussions about what they read, responding sincerely to the ideas they write, and making printed materials available. Parents become partners with educators in supporting their adolescents' growth.

Members of the local community often are partners with adolescents. Libraries, religious groups, and after-school programs are centers for community workers and volunteers to assist adolescents with homework, tutor individuals with learning difficulties, and initiate book discussion groups. Businesses become partners with schools by providing mentors and role models as well as funds for buying books and recognizing achievements.

Adolescents preparing for the 21st century deserve new forms of collaboration among educators. Community colleges, technical schools, and universities can offer input and assistance. Professional organizations working together and exploring relationships among reading, writing, and learning may lead to new educational directions. The educational community can demonstrate that adolescent literacy is important.

The many dimensions of adolescent literacy are addressed best in school reform and restructuring that place the growth of students at the center of every activity. Environments of high expectations, inquiry, and decision making encourage students to refine the reading and writing abilities they have and take the risks necessary to grow. Adolescents deserve new perspectives on what it means to know a subject and to display that knowledge. Surface changes to schools involving scheduling and required courses are not enough to fully support adolescents' advanced reading and writing.

Finally, the CAL believes that the literacy achievement of adolescents cannot grow to new levels without changes in governmental policy. Emphasizing the achievement of early readers has not produced adolescents who read and write at high levels of proficiency. Adolescents deserve increased levels of governmental support. This includes appropriate funding for intervention services in the upper grades, the point in most comparisons at which children in the United States perform less well. School libraries can be the center of efforts to encourage wide reading, but for decades they have seen a steady decline in funding. Governmental support also involves exerting leadership to mobilize initiatives among parents and local communities.

Government can support ongoing staff development for helping students grow in literacy as they grow in content knowledge. Furthermore, government can support literacy research concentrating on the upper grades where literacy proficiencies are less well understood than those at the lower grades.

A commitment to growth

Public and educational attention long has been focused on the beginnings of literacy, planting seedlings and making sure that they take root. But without careful cultivation and nurturing, seedlings may wither and their growth become stunted. We, as members of the International Reading Association Commission on Adolescent Literacy, urge policy makers, administrators, business people, community members, parents, and educators to commit themselves to supporting adolescents' literacy in the ways presented in this position statement. Adolescents deserve enhanced opportunities to grow into healthy, strong, and independent readers and writers.

SUGGESTED READINGS

Shouldn't adolescents already be literate?

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Vacca, R. (1998). Let's not marginalize adolescent literacy. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy, 41,* 604–609.

Adolescents deserve access to a wide variety of reading material that they can and want to read

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Worthy, J., Moorman, M., & Turner, M. (1999). What Johnny likes to read is hard to find in school. *Reading Research Quarterly, 34,* 12–53.

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Adolescents deserve assessment that shows them their strengths as well as their needs and that guides their teachers to design instruction that will best help them grow as readers

Bauer, E.B. (1999). The promise of alternative literacy assessments in the classroom: A review of empirical studies. *Reading Research and Instruction, 38,* 153–168.

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Wiggins, G.M., Jr. (1998). *Understanding by design.* Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Adolescents deserve expert teachers who model and provide explicit instruction in reading comprehension and study strategies across the curriculum

Alvermann, D.E., & Phelps, S.F. (1998). *Content area reading and literacy: Succeeding in today's diverse classrooms* (2nd ed.). Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

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Weinstein, C.E., & Hume, L.M. (1998). *Study strategies for lifelong learning.* Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Adolescents deserve reading specialists who assist individual students having difficulty learning how to read

Allen, J. (1995). *It's never too late: Leading adolescents to lifelong literacy.* Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Anderson, V., & Roit, M. (1993). Planning and implementing collaborative strategy instruction for delayed readers in grades 6–10. *The Elementary School Journal, 94,* 121–138.

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Rose, M. (1989). *Lives on the boundary: The struggles and achievements of America's underprepared.* New York: Free Press

Adolescents deserve teachers who are trained to understand the complexities of individual adolescent readers, respect their differences, and respond to their characteristics

Beane, J.A. (1990). *A middle school curriculum: From rhetoric to reality.* Columbus, OH: National Middle School Association.

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Related resources from IRA

Books

Reading for Meaning: Fostering Comprehension in the Middle Grades

Barbara M. Taylor, Michael F. Graves, Paul van den Broek, Editors

Reading comprehension is of great concern to many Americans, as evidenced by the mandate in most states today for graduation standards in reading and for assessment aligned to those standards. In *Reading for Meaning*, leading scholars and researchers provide a broad overview of current educational and psychological research about effective strategies for teaching reading comprehension to middle grade students. This rich collection offers practitioners, researchers, and literacy specialists a valuable resource for improving reading comprehension at the middle school level. (Available November 1999)

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Popular Culture in the Classroom: Teaching and Researching Critical Media Literacy (Literacy Studies Series)

Donna E. Alvermann, Jennifer S. Moon, Margaret C. Hagood

This book addresses the importance of developing within children and adolescents a critical awareness of the social, political, and economic messages emanating from the different forms of popular culture. The authors explain the term *critical media literacy* and the different cultural resources each author brings to the book, then consider the issues surrounding the selection and introduction of popular culture texts for use in critical media literacy lessons and provide examples of teaching strategies they have used to engage students in these lessons. The authors also give a detailed analysis of how children's and adolescents' identities are constructed through the media, and synthesize where the field is and needs to go in researching critical media literacy. Consider the possibilities involved in teaching critical media literacy using popular culture, and explore what such teaching might look like in your classroom. (March 1999 Book Club selection)

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Teaching Literacy Using Information Technology: A Collection of Articles From the Australian Literacy Educators' Association

Joelie Hancock, Editor

Rapid changes and advancements in technology are raising questions for teachers, librarians, and administrators about how to integrate these changes into the curriculum and the classroom. *Teaching Literacy Using Information Technology* provides valuable insight into the pros and cons of instituting and using information technology (IT) in the classroom. Learn how to establish acceptable-use policies for principals and administrators, select and purchase appropriate software and CD-ROM products, coordinate computer access among students, train teachers, and maintain parents' cooperation and involvement. This book is an excellent source of background information about technology use and practical advice for teachers. (January 1999 Book Club selection)

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Language Study in Middle School, High School, and Beyond

John S. Simmons, Lawrence Baines, Editors

The contributors to this book believe that language should be the central focus for study in the reading and language arts classroom and that gaining mastery over language can be stimulating, enlightening, and enjoyable. The text presents 10 diverse viewpoints on language study in the middle school and secondary school that are divided into the following areas: studying language through literature and the arts, using writing and speaking to study language, language use in different academic settings, and emerging trends in language study. All the chapters recommend that language study can be connected to students' lives in visceral as well as rational ways. (February 1998 Book Club selection)

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On the Brink: Negotiating Literature and Life With Adolescents

Susan Hynds

This book is a chronicle of one teacher's struggle to implement a constructivist approach to teaching English in a culturally diverse urban middle school. Teachers will recognize the struggles of their own adolescent students in Hynds's careful studies of these young readers and writers. *On the Brink* makes an argument for an activist, social constructivist approach, without minimizing the difficulties faced by teachers of literature as they attempt to negotiate the complicated social, cultural, and political arena of their own classroom. (November 1997 Book Club selection)

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Envisioning Literature: Literary Understanding and Literature Instruction

Judith A. Langer

This book offers new ways of thinking about literature instruction and its contribution to students' learning. Langer focuses her theory of literature instruction on creating "literate communities" in the classroom and developing a reader-based pedagogy for all students. Filled with the words of students and teachers and rich with narratives of actual classroom experiences in elementary, middle, and high schools in urban and suburban communities, *Envisioning Literature* provides both strong theory about teaching literature and real examples that provide a context for change. (January 1996 Book Club selection)

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Guiding Readers Through Text: A Review of Study Guides

Karen D. Wood, Diane Lapp, James Flood

Study guides are useful tools for enhancing instruction at any grade level and in any content area. This practical book discusses why and how study guides help students comprehend text, while emphasizing the most effective ways to use these guides in the classroom. Complete descriptions of different types of study guides along with examples from a wide variety of lessons in primary through secondary grades, will help teachers select the best guides for their purpose. (August 1992 Book Club selection)

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Responses to Literature: Grades K–8

James M. Macon, Diane Bewell, MaryEllen Vogt

A practical tool for teaching students how to respond to literature, this book provides 10 classroom activities that encourage students to think more as they read and to focus on the literary elements of a story. Each activity is preceded by a concise description that includes the purpose of the activity and the grade level it addresses, as well as a completed chart. Reproducible blank charts also are provided. Activities are classroom tested, may be tailored to fit each literature selection, and may be used with small or large groups. (December 1990 Book Club selection)

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Prereading Activities for Content Area Reading and Learning (second edition)

David W. Moore, John E. Readence, Robert J. Rickelman

This book describes a wealth of prereading activities and strategies designed to help teachers make the unfamiliar and often unappealing material of textbooks understandable to students. The authors feature ideas teachers can apply in the classroom, strategies for making students independent learners, and a chapter on writing. (December 1988 Book Club selection)

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Booklists

Magazines for Kids and Teens (revised edition)

Donald R. Stoll, Editor

This is an easy-to-use guide to publications covering almost every conceivable interest of children and teens. It contains more than 200 listings that parents, teachers, librarians, and young people can choose from—complete with descriptions and ordering information. In a How-to-Use section the editor assists readers in selecting magazines to explore, and indexes to age and grade levels, subjects, and a list of magazines that publish readers' works also are included. Copublished with the Educational Press Association of America. (July 1997 Book Club selection)

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More Teens' Favorite Books: Young Adults' Choices 1993–1995

This book is an indispensable resource for anyone trying to get reluctant teenagers to read. The books on this annotated list are selected by the toughest critics around—the teens themselves. Over 4,000 ballots are cast annually to select just 30 books to be named as IRA's Young Adults' Choices. This valuable resource for teachers, librarians, parents, and young readers includes a new section titled Reading for Pleasure. Featured in the section are veterans of the struggle to

get young people reading—teachers. You'll discover ways teachers are motivating teens to read for fun, promoting free-choice reading. (September 1996 Book Club selection)

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Young Adults' Choices

The books on this list are selected by young adult readers as the ones they consider the most enjoyable and informative. Titles are chosen by students in middle schools and high schools across the United States. Complete bibliographic data and annotations are supplied for each title. *Young Adults' Choices* is a project of IRA's Literature for Adolescents Committee.

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